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ENGLISH CHURCH HYMNODY.

A LECTURE

13

READ AT THE CHURCH CONGRESS,

YORK, OCTOBER 11, 1866,

BY

SIR ROUNDELL PALMER.

Selfborne

London and Cambridge:
MACMILLAN AND CO.

1867.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

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ENGLISH CHURCH HYMNODY.

1. The term "Hymnology" may have seemed to promise more than I mean upon this occasion to attempt. I do not pretend to deal with the musical part of the subject, nor to enter upon so wide a field as the history or criticism of the hymns of all nations and languages. I shall confine myself to English hymnody, with reference chiefly to its use in the public worship of the Church of England.

2. I begin with assuming (what might easily be proved) that the use of hymns or anthems, not set forth by authority, is allowable in our public worship, whenever it does not interrupt the continuity of any prescribed order of the Church.

3. The object of hymnody, although its use is variable and discretionary, is, of course, not merely to afford relief during the pauses of a more serious duty: it is in itself, when rightly understood and applied, an act of worship of the highest, heartiest,

and most intelligent kind. "I confess," said Richard Baxter, "that harmony and melody are the pleasure and elevation of my soul, and have made a psalm of praise in the holy assembly the chief delightful exercise of my religion and my life, and hath helped to bear down all the objections which I have heard against Church music." To give it this character, the choice of hymns ought to be made upon the principle that their matter and words are of cardinal importance; the music being accessory to the sense, and chosen with a view to give it lively and harmonious expression. When "praises" are "sung with understanding," it is not only a fit utterance of the higher spiritual emotions, to "a mind in tune," with the "powers in vigorous exercise," the "thoughts bright and intense," and "the whole soul awake" (words which I have adopted from Simon Browne);—it is not only a powerful instrument for the education, direction, and development of those emotions, in a mind less active and mature; but it is very often a key by which the inner meaning and spiritual application of Scripture and of its language and imagery is opened and made practical to simple people, far better than by expositions or commentaries. The opinion, which once prevailed, that nothing but psalms

taken directly from Scripture ought to be sung in the congregation, was narrow and groundless: but the substance of Scripture, assimilated and made part of the spiritual life, has always supplied the principal matter for the best hymns; and this may explain why excellent hymns have been written by persons who have given no proofs of skill in any other kind of poetry. Religious enthusiasm, fed by the poetry of inspiration, grows like that which it lives upon, and reflects the warmth and light which it could not have originated.

4. If a hymn ought to be the expression of lively apprehensions of spiritual things, and of genuine religious emotions and aspirations, in the mouth of the worshipper, it is evident that it must have come, with these characters, fresh from the heart and mind of the person who wrote it. To be "recited with rapture" (I again use the words of Simon Browne), it ought to be "written under a kind of inspiration." Whatever detracts from this, mars its effect. And, for this reason, it ought not to be vulgar, prosaic, or didactic; it should be high in tone, simple and pure in taste and feeling, and not without some touch of the fire and energy of poetry.

5. From these premises I draw certain con-

clusions, which I will proceed to state and enforce as far as I am able: and, if I occupy a little time in doing so, my excuse must be that I do not find them so generally accepted by others as (with the belief I have of their justice and importance) I could wish them to be.

6. My first conclusion is that a healthy natural taste is more to be trusted in the composition and selection of hymns than technical rules, supposed to be derived from antiquity, or from the criticism of the works of other ages. The ancient hymn-writers did not, in fact, work by such rules: their manner was natural, and suitable to their own time; but it does not follow that it should be a law to ours. A passage is sometimes quoted from St. Augustine, in which he speaks of a hymn as a "song of praise to God"; and this definition has been offered as one of the tests by which all hymns ought to be approved or rejected. But what can be the value of a definition which would exclude every hymn of which the spirit is supplication rather than praise? I know not whether this rule is supposed to require that a hymn should assume the form of a direct invocation or address to God: yet I am at a loss to understand on what other ground Addison's hymn, "*The spacious firmament on high,*" can have been thought to

offend against it, by a learned writer in the *Quarterly Review* of January, 1862; who adds, "if it is poetry, it is certainly not song; yet has been brought, by old associations, into many hymn-books." For my own part I fervently hope that it may always remain there. Praise to God, as glorified in His works, is the substance and essence of every part of that hymn, as it is of the beautiful verses of the 19th Psalm on which it is founded. If it be not poetry, I do not know what is; and to prove that it is song (and soul-stirring song too) it is only necessary to hear it (as I often have) heartily sung to an appropriate tune.

7. Another arbitrary rule (also advocated by considerable authority) condemns the use, in hymns, of the singular pronouns "*I*" and "*my*," instead of the plural "*we*" and "*our*," as "inconsistent with the united song of a congregation looking Godward," and opposed to the spirit of the early Church. Such a point ought surely to be determined by reason, not authority: and I cannot find for it any good reason. Private meditations, which express the circumstances, experiences, or emotions of particular persons, in a way distinctively applicable to those individuals, are (of course) not appropriate for public use. But, if an act of praise or worship, suitable for the participation of Christ-

ians in general, takes form naturally as the song of an individual soul "looking God-ward," its simultaneous adoption and application to himself by every member of a congregation makes it as much "the united song of the congregation" as if it were conceived in the plural. A congregation is the aggregate of a number of individuals: it cannot "look God-ward," except through those individuals. The essence of public Christian worship consists in the combination of the separate devotion of each particular person present, with the sense of Christian brotherhood, binding them all together. The Quarterly Reviewer, for reasons not satisfactory to my mind, thinks the incorporation of the Psalms of David, and other Scripture-songs, (which generally run in the first person singular), into both Jewish and Christian worship, irrelevant to this question. But the first person singular is also used in the Apostolic and Nicene Creeds; which, in the public services of the Church, are hymns of the most solemn kind, and embody the common profession of faith of the whole congregation: and the *Te Deum*, although expressed (down to the last verse) in the plural, ends with a petition in the singular number. This rule (like the former) tends to proscribe most supplicatory hymns. Such hymns as "*Rock of Ages, cleft for me;*" "*When I survey*

the wondrous Cross ;” “ *Jesus, Lover of my soul ;*” “ *My God, my Father, while I stray ;*” “ *Nearer, my God, to Thee ;*” “ *Abide with me, fast falls the eventide ;*” Ken’s Morning and Evening Hymns ; and Keble’s “ *Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear,*” are proved, by the common assent of most of our Churches, to be fit for united song by the congregation : yet the singular form is as proper and necessary in them as the plural can possibly be in others. Even with respect to antiquity, a canon which would condemn the “ *Dies Iræ*” does not seem to me to be entitled to very profound veneration.

8. My next conclusion is, that good native English hymns are, generally speaking, to be preferred to translations properly so called. It is the peculiar defect of metrical translation that it cannot give the natural manner, or the real mind, either of the author or of the translator. It is a curious exercise of art, not a spontaneous production. It moves in fetters : it is compelled to find substitutes (for want of precise equivalents in different languages) for the finer touches, which give colour and character to the original. Under the exigencies of verse and rhyme, it is alternately diluted with expletives, and starved by arbitrary compression. It aims at being a copy, under conditions which make complete success impossible.

9. These observations apply, with especial force, to metrical versions of the Psalms; which are, perhaps, of all compositions, the most unfit for such treatment. No one can read the prose translations of the Psalms in our Bibles and Prayer-books, without feeling their extreme power and beauty: no one can pass from them to the "Old" or "New" Version, or to any other of the numerous similar attempts, without perceiving that (with very rare exceptions) the power and beauty are gone; that the water-springs have dried up, and the fruitful land has become barren. Not only the authors of the "Old" and "New" and Scotch Versions, but Sir Philip Sidney and his sister the Countess of Pembroke, Milton in his boyhood, Wither, Sandys, Sir John Denham, John Keble, and many more, have tried what could be done, upon the principle of a strict and full adherence to the Hebrew sense. It is not too much to say, that all of them have failed. From the collective results of their labours it would be difficult to extract more than about fifteen or twenty Psalms, or portions of Psalms, really good and suitable for singing in our public services: and few of these are of any high order of merit. On the other hand, those writers who, without professing to translate, founded hymns of their own upon passages or thoughts which they

felt to be suitable for the purpose, either in the Psalms or in other parts of Scripture, (as Addison, Watts, Doddridge, Lyte, and James Montgomery), have contributed to English hymnody many of its richest treasures. To reckon works of this class among "psalms," as distinguished from "hymns," (as has been done in many books), is a manifest error: but, when they are subtracted, little remains for the sake of which it can be worth while to continue that distinction.

10. The same observations hold true, though in a less degree, with respect to translations from the hymns of the primitive Church, and from the German. Generally, such translations are neither ancient nor modern, neither foreign nor English. Those from the Greek and Latin are apt to be stiff and mannered, without the easy flow and vigorous simplicity of the originals. Those which avoid these faults have not always the character of popular hymns; and this is especially the case with translations from the German, in which language the originals (perhaps from some peculiarity in the genius of that nation) are usually odes or elegiac poems, rather than hymns proper for use in our services.

11. If I might suggest a practical criterion of the value of translated hymns, it would be this.

They should be judged as if they were English compositions, in every sense original, without any bias from reverence for antiquity, or ecclesiastical associations. The mind should be on its guard against the influence of beauties, known and admired in the foreign originals, but which are difficult to be preserved in translation. If, tried by this test, they are found to be good and thoroughly vernacular English hymns, such as, coming from any quarter, we should have been glad to accept, they will undoubtedly be entitled to a place in our hymnals; but, otherwise, they ought to be excluded. Out of the many interesting translations which we possess from ancient hymns, (chiefly by Mant, Isaac Williams, Chandler, Neale, Caswall, and Chambers), and from the German, (by Jacobi, the Wesleys, Mr. Massie, Mr. Russell, Miss Winkworth, Miss Cox, and others), a small number may probably be collected, which will stand this test. The shorter translation from the "*Veni Creator*," in the Ordination Service; Isaac Williams's "*Our praise Thou need'st not, but Thy love*;" Ray Palmer's "*Jesus, Thou Joy of loving hearts*;" and Neale's Alleluistic Sequence, "*The strain upraise of joy and praise*," are good examples.

12. My third deduction from the same principles is, that hymns (or those parts of them which are

adopted into our Hymnals) ought to be taken as they are written, with the strictest possible adherence to the words of their authors. It signifies little if we meet, here and there, with a defective rhyme, or a phrase open to criticism; but it is vitally important that there should be no interference with the life, consistency, and reality of the composition, as the true expression of what the writer actually felt when "the fire" was "kindled" within him. It is not the injustice done to the writer upon which I would mainly dwell; although, on that point, the complaint of James Montgomery ought to be heard. "If good people," he says, "cannot conscientiously adopt the writer's diction and doctrine, it is a little questionable in them to impose upon him theirs, which he may as honestly hesitate to receive. Yet this is the cross by which every author of a hymn, who hopes to be useful in his generation, may expect to be tested, at the pleasure of any Christian brother, however incompetent or little qualified to amend what he may deem amiss, in one of the most delicate and difficult exercises of a tender heart and an enlightened understanding." My complaint, in the general interest of British hymnody, is, that the tendency, and the practical effect, of this system of tampering with the text, is not really to amend, but is to

patch, disfigure, spoil, and emasculate; and, even when nothing worse is done, to substitute neutral tints for natural colouring, and a dead for a living sense. A real poet, if he were to suffer himself to change a word or a line in the works of other men whenever he thought they were capable of improvement, would be much more likely to deface what he meddled with, than to produce anything worthy of himself. Much more those who have not the gift of poetry. The old story of the painter who, believing his work to be perfect, invited every bystander to paint over what he did not like, is realised in these cases: there is no part of the composition which one man or another does not find fault with and change; the only difference is, that it is done without invitation. There are hardly any conditions of mind more opposed to each other, than the spirit of minute criticism and that of poetical enthusiasm; and when a work, composed under the poetical impulse, is altered by a stranger in the critical mood, it cannot be wondered at if the result described by Ovid follows:—

“*Frigida pugnabant calidis, humentia siccis,
Mollia cum duris, sine pondere habentia pondus.*”

There is a medley of hot and cold, moist and dry,

soft and hard, weighty matter and matter without weight.

13. What has been said of alteration leads naturally to abbreviation; which, indeed, is in many cases advantageous, and in not a few unavoidable. But, if it is worth while to sing hymns at all, it is worth while to allow as much time for singing as will make it complete, hearty, and intelligent: and an abridgment or selection of parts, when proper, ought to be so made as to omit nothing which is requisite to unity, symmetry, and completeness, both of structure and of sense. The part taken should be a perfect hymn in itself: the parts omitted ought to be separable, so as to leave behind, when they are removed, no chasm, no sign of mutilation, no abrupt unsatisfactory end. Yet there are some hymn-books in which these principles are entirely lost sight of: books which seem to have been manufactured with the scissors, without much aid from the mind; as if it were as easy a thing to measure and cut off two or three inches from a hymn as from a yard of calico or broad-cloth. It is surely better to abstain altogether from compositions, which may be thought to exceed the desirable length, than to use them in this way.

14. If doctrinal or theological reasons are pleaded

for the system of alteration and curtailment against which I contend, my answer is—By all means let any hymn be rejected which is really open to a well-founded doctrinal objection; but do not make a compromise by patching in such cases; do not endeavour to exorcise the heresy by spoiling the hymn; and, in the first instance, do not examine into its orthodoxy in a narrow suspicious temper, so as to conjure up doctrinal errors where there really are none. The office of a hymn is not to teach controversial theology, but to give the voice of song to practical religion. No doubt, to do this, it must embody sound doctrine; but it ought to do so, not after the manner of the schools, but with the breadth, freedom, and simplicity of the Fountain-head. Whatever does this ought to be frankly and cordially accepted, without regard to any peculiarities of the sect or party to which the author may have belonged. Sound and good words need not be taken in a crooked sense, because the writer may have professed or may have controversially denied this or that dogma. Scripture is large and comprehensive, presenting both the poles and the whole circumference of truth; and it is following in the track of error to see truth on one side only, and to disparage one aspect of it because those who rejoice in that may be insensible

to another. Newton said well, in his Preface to the Olney Hymns, "As the workings of the heart of man and of the Spirit of God are, in general, the same in all who are the subjects of grace, I hope most of these hymns, being the fruit and expression of my own experience, will coincide with the views of real Christians of all denominations." When a hymn real in feeling, good in taste, poetical in thought and execution, has this essentially Catholic tone, nothing more is necessary to prove its fitness for the use of good Churchmen: when this tone is wanting, when it diverges from the common central ground to points more disputable, it may, or it may not, be orthodox; but it is seldom, if ever, excellent.

15. If the objection be, not that the theology of a hymn is unsound, but that its tone or language is irreverent or too familiar, I admit this also (supposing the criticism to be well founded, as it sometimes is) to be a good reason, not for the alteration, but for the rejection of the hymn. But here, too, there is great need of sound discrimination. Coldness is not reverence; nor is all warmth of expression undue familiarity. If that love which is the highest attainment, towards which the mind of every Christian ought to be directed, is a real lively affection of the heart,

and not an abstract principle, then the emotions and the language proper to that affection cannot be banished from our hymns, merely because the English tongue uses one term to express the two ideas, which the Greeks distinguished by their words “ἀγάπη” and “ἔρως,” or because other words may have a similar double use. Men certainly not irreverent, (as George Herbert and Bishop Ken,) habitually used such language, with a warmth and freedom far exceeding what would be suitable for general adoption; and I remember a criticism even of the *Christian Year*, in which exception was taken, on this ground, to some passages in that work of one of the most reverent among men. Charles Wesley’s hymn, “*Jesus, Lover of my soul*,” has been blamed on this account: if justly, I do not see why like blame should not attach to the Latin hymn, “*Jesu, dulcedo cordium*,” and to several others. Of which I would say, that, where (as in these cases) the ideas and imagery are all suggested by those Scriptures which are continually read in our churches, while the context, and the whole tone and spirit of the composition, utterly repel every low and irreverent thought, it does seem to me to be a very unhealthy criticism, which would call up earthly associations, in order to found upon them censure, not otherwise deserved.

16. Argument is best enforced by example; and examples of vicious alteration abound in almost every hymn-book. Some of the strongest (though not stronger than may be found elsewhere) occur in *Hymns for the Church of England*—a book upon which much care has evidently been bestowed. The Editor, in the Preface to a recent Edition, (in which he has often partially restored the original text of hymns which he had altered more extensively in one or more former editions), explains his object to have been to make the hymns “agree with the reverent and grave tone of Holy Scripture and the Book of Common Prayer.” The following instances will show the treatment, even in this amended edition, of some of the finest, most spirited, and most popular hymns in the English language; hymns (I venture to say) absolutely unexceptionable in point of doctrine and taste, and which have no more important technical defects than here and there a faulty rhyme, or an over-forcible expression.

(1.) I shall first read the “*Rock of Ages*” as Toplady wrote it.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
 Let me hide myself in Thee!
 Let the water and the Blood,
 From Thy riven side which flow'd,
 Be of sin the double cure,
 Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Not the labours of my hands
 Can fulfil Thy law's demands ;
 Could my zeal no respite know,
 Could my tears for ever flow,
 All for sin could not atone ;
 Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring ;
 Simply to Thy Cross I cling ;
 Naked, come to Thee for dress ;
 Helpless, look to Thee for grace ;
 Foul, I to the Fountain fly ;
 Wash me, Saviour, or I die !

While I draw this fleeting breath ;
 When my eyestrings break in death ;
 When I soar through tracts unknown,
 See Thee on Thy Judgment-throne ;
 Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
 Let me hide myself in Thee !

(2.) I now proceed to read it, as it is altered in
Hymns for the Church of England.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
 Let me hide myself in Thee !
 Let the water and the Blood,
 From Thy riven side which flow'd,
 Be of sin the double cure,
 Save from wrath, and make me pure.

Could my tears for ever flow,
 And my zeal no langour know,
 All for sin could not atone ;
 Thou must save, and Thou alone ;
 Nothing in my hand I bring,
 Simply to Thy Cross I cling.

While I draw this fleeting breath ;
When mine eyelids close in death ;
When I hear the midnight cry,
Telling that the Judge is nigh ;
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee !

It will be seen that, in the last line of the first stanza, merely to improve a defective rhyme, the simple force of Toplady's three concentrated ideas, the desire to be made clean, the sense of guilt, and the sense of the power of sin, is lost by the total omission of the latter idea, and by the change of the sense of guilt into the fear of punishment. The two middle stanzas are ungracefully compressed into one, and the word "respite" is, to say the least, unnecessarily altered to "languor": power being lost, both by the omission of much which contributes to the perfection of Toplady's work, and by the changes in position of the parts retained. In the last stanza, besides "eyelids close" instead of "eyestrings break," (a needless variation which is found in almost every hymn-book,) the fine couplet, "When I soar," &c., is displaced for one entirely new and much less energetic.

Who can say, that there is anything in these variations more agreeable to the tone of Holy Scripture, or of the Book of Common Prayer,

than in Toplady's work ; or that the entire hymn was so long as to require abridgment ?

My next instance is Doddridge's "*Hark, the glad sound!*" than which, I venture to say, a more sweet, vigorous, and perfect composition is not to be found, even in the whole body of ancient hymns :—

(1.) This is Doddridge's text.

Hark, the glad sound ! the Saviour comes,
The Saviour promised long ;
Let every heart prepare a throne,
And every voice a song !

He comes, the prisoners to release
In Satan's bondage held ;
The gates of brass before Him burst,
The iron fetters yield.

He comes, from thickest films of vice
To clear the mental ray,
And on the eyeballs of the blind
To pour celestial day.

He comes, the broken heart to bind,
The bleeding soul to cure,
And with the treasures of His grace
T' enrich the humble poor.

Our glad Hosannas, Prince of Peace,
Thy welcome shall proclaim,
And Heaven's eternal arches ring
With Thy belovèd name.

(2.) It is thus turned in *Hymns for the Church of England*:

Hark, the glad sound! the Saviour comes,
 The Saviour promised long;
 Let every heart exult for joy,
 And every voice be song.

He comes, the prisoners to relieve
 In Satan's bondage sealed;
 The gates of brass before Him burst,
 The iron fetters yield.

He comes, from darkening scales of vice
 To clear the inward sight;
 And on the eyeballs of the blind
 To pour celestial light.

He comes, the wounded soul to heal,
 The broken heart to bind,
 And with the riches of His grace
 To bless the lowly mind.

Our glad Hosannas, Prince of Peace,
 Thine advent shall proclaim;
 And Heaven's exalted arches ring
 With Thy most honoured Name.

How inferior the altered work is to the original! Every single change is gratuitous; not one for the better; almost all much for the worse. "Let every heart *prepare a throne*" is turned into "Let every heart *exult for joy*." The prisoners are to be "*relieved*," instead of "*released*." They are "*sealed*," instead of "*held*" in Satan's bondage.

The "*thickest films*" are turned into the "*darkening scales*" of vice; "*ray*" into "*sight*," and "*day*" into "*light*." And the "*riches*," instead of the "*treasures*," of Christ's grace, are to "*bless*," instead of "*enrich*," "*the lowly mind*," instead of "*the humble poor*." The arches of heaven are "*exalted*," instead of "*eternal*"; and the Saviour's name is "*most honoured*," instead of "*belovèd*."

A third hymn, of like excellence, (with the exception of one stanza, the omission of which the author himself suggested, by enclosing it within brackets, at the time of its first publication,) is Dr. Watts's "*When I survey the wondrous Cross*." His text (omitting the bracketed stanza) is this:—

- (1.) When I survey the wondrous Cross
 On which the Prince of glory died,
 My richest gain I count but loss,
 And pour contempt on all my pride.
 Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
 Save in the death of Christ, my God;
 All the vain things that charm me most,
 I sacrifice them to His blood.
 See from His head, His hands, His feet,
 Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
 Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
 Or thorns compose so rich a crown?
 Were the whole realm of nature mine,
 That were a present far too small;
 Love, so amazing, so divine,
 Demands my soul, my life, my all.

In *Hymns for the Church of England*, these four stanzas are transformed as follows:—

(2.) When I survey the wondrous Cross
 On which the King of glory died,
 My richest gain I count but loss,
 And pour contempt on all my pride.

O may I know no other boast
 Than Christ, and His atoning blood;
 All the vain things that charm me most,
 I plunge beneath that saving flood.

Behold His head, His hands, His feet;
 See love and sorrow flowing down:
 Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
 Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Blest Lord, by whom alone I live,
 Who hast my life redeemed, may I
 To Thee both soul and body give,
 And sinful passions crucify.

There is just enough of Watts left here to remind one of Horace's saying, that you may know the remains of a poet, even when he is torn to pieces: but how is it possible that any man, knowing the original, can prefer the substitute?

17. What has been said requires two, and (so far as I am aware) only two qualifications. First, there may be cases in which part of a composition, well suited for use as a hymn, requires some change in the commencement, or in words of connection or reference, to sever it from its context: or in

which some antiquated form of expression, or some word, no longer popularly understood in the sense intended by the author, might (if allowed to remain) have a disturbing effect, or might suggest incongruous associations. I do not say that alteration in such cases may not be justified: but, if so, it should be limited by the necessity which justifies it, and should be tolerated only, as the less of two evils; like the restoration of a broken statue, or a damaged picture. Madan was not blameable for altering the word "welkin" in the first line of Charles Wesley's Christmas Hymn—

Hark! how all the welkin rings,
Glory to the King of Kings!

But he went beyond the necessity of the case, in the well-known couplet which he substituted—

Hark! the herald angels sing,
Glory to the new-born King!

And, in so doing, he departed from the substance of the angelic song, to which Wesley had adhered. Still less was he warranted in proceeding to change the fine lines at the end of the stanza—

Universal Nature say,
Christ the Lord is born to-day!

into the very inferior couplet—

With th' angelic host proclaim,
Christ is born in Bethlehem!

18. Secondly, there is a difference between patchwork alterations, and a hymn by one writer, founded upon the earlier work of another, from which he has drawn his materials, but has recast them, as by a new and original effort. In these cases success is possible, though not easy, if the later writer has himself attained to a real enthusiasm, so as to make the work his own, and lose the copyist in the poet. Of such success our hymnody supplies several examples: perhaps the best is Cameron's beautiful hymn, in the Scotch paraphrases, "*How bright these glorious spirits shine!*" which is derived from one by Watts.

19. Having so far explained the principles which I think ought to be kept in view in hymnals for Church use, and having stated my reasons for preferring generally vernacular English hymns to translations, I propose, during the rest of this lecture, to give a short sketch of the rise and progress of our native hymnody, and of the characteristic qualities of some of its principal authors. Some idea of the multitude of hymns extant in our language may perhaps be formed, when it is stated, that the compositions published under that designation (or as Psalms, not translated) by eight authors only, (Watts, Simon Browne, Doddridge, Charles Wesley, Newton, Beddome, Kelly, and

James Montgomery), number about 6,500: and that in 1861 Mr. Sedgwick (to whom all English hymnologists are under great obligations) published a catalogue of 618 authors of original English hymns, (72 of them also translators,) besides 53 who were translators only.

20. The hymn-writers most worthy of note with whom I am acquainted, from the Reformation till the end of the seventeenth century, are the anonymous Roman Catholic author of the New Jerusalem hymn of the time of Queen Elizabeth, which, as amplified by David Dickson, is well known and popular in Scotland; and Wither, Crossman, Austin, Jeremy Taylor, Baxter, Mason, Shepherd, and Ken;—all (except the Elizabethan author, and Austin, who was also a Roman Catholic) bred in the Church of England; though Baxter and Shepherd, after holding benefices, became Nonconformists. Wither published, in the reign of Charles I., 233 hymns for the Festivals of the Church and other occasions. Crossman's "Divine Poems" (three in number, appended to his *Young Man's Calling*); Austin's "Offices" for private devotion, containing about forty hymns; a small number of hymns (in uncouth metres, not fit for singing) by Bishop Taylor; Baxter's "Poetical Fragments," including about twenty-eight hymns;

Mason's forty-one "Songs of Praise"; and Bishop Ken's three well-known hymns, for Morning, Evening, and Midnight, are all of the time of Charles II. Shepherd's thirty "Penitential Cries" appeared about three years after the Revolution.

21. The works of these writers were not intended for congregational use; and very few of them are at all well adapted for it. Abridgments, however, from Bishop Ken's Morning and Evening Hymns have long been, and (probably) will always continue to be, popular: and a portion of one by Baxter (generally more or less varied) deservedly finds a place in most of our hymnals. The following stanzas by Crossman are extremely fine, and not unsuitable for general use:—

Jerusalem on high
 My song and City is,
 My home whene'er I die,
 The centre of my bliss:
 O happy place!
 When shall I be,
 My God, with Thee,
 To see Thy face?

Thy walls, sweet City, thine,
 With pearls are garnishèd;
 Thy gates with praises shine,
 Thy streets with gold are spread:
 O happy place! &c.

No sun by day shines there,
 Nor moon by silent night;

Oh no ! these needless are ;
 The Lamb's the City's Light.
 O happy place ! &c.

There dwells my Lord, my King,
 Judged here unfit to live ;
 There angels to Him sing,
 And lowly homage give.
 O happy place ! &c.

The Patriarchs of old
 There from their travels cease ;
 The Prophets there behold
 Their longed-for Prince of Peace.
 O happy place ! &c.

The Lamb's Apostles there
 I might with joy behold :
 The Harpers I might hear
 Harping on harps of gold.
 O happy place ! &c.

The bleeding Martyrs, they
 Within those courts are found,
 Clothèd in pure array,
 Their scars with glory crown'd.
 O happy place ! &c.

Ah me ! ah me ! that I
 In Kedar's tents here stay !
 No place like this on high !
 Thither, Lord, guide my way !
 O happy place ! &c.

Austin is a graceful and poetical writer, with few Roman Catholic peculiarities : his best contribution to our hymn-books is the following :—

Blest be Thy love, dear Lord,
 That taught us this sweet way,
 Only to love Thee for Thyself,
 And for that love obey.

O Thou, our soul's chief hope!
 We to Thy mercy fly;
 Where'er we are, Thou canst protect,
 Whate'er we need, supply.

Whether we sleep or wake,
 To Thee we both resign;
 By night we see, as well as day,
 If Thy light on us shine.

Whether we live or die,
 Both we submit to Thee;
 In death we live, as well as life,
 If Thine in death we be.

Mason's "Songs of Praise," though disfigured by quaintness, amounting to the grotesque, have in them a very fine vein of poetry: and later writers have dug out of them much pure ore. One hymn at least, fit for general use—

There is a Stream, which issues forth
 From God's eternal throne, &c,

may be taken from them without any change of text.

Besides the hymns of these writers, another worthy of note, the popular Christmas Hymn beginning, "*While shepherds watched their flocks*

by night," was published, in the "Supplement" to the New Version of the Psalms, by Tate and Brady; to whose general style its severe simplicity bears no resemblance.

22. At the commencement of the eighteenth century, the name of Addison stands apart. He cannot be classed either with the earlier hymn-writers already mentioned, or with those of whom we shall presently speak. Five hymns only are attributed to him; four of them certainly are his; all are well known; all are graceful and popular; though the style of one, "*When, rising from the bed of death*," is so much more homely than that of the rest as to suggest a doubt whether it can really be from the same hand. Three of them, (that, and the hymns founded on the 19th and 23rd Psalms,) are justly esteemed, and generally used in our churches. The other two are of a more private and personal character.

23. The rest of the hymns of the eighteenth century may be divided into (1) those which proceeded from the Independent or Baptist Nonconformists in England, and the Presbyterian body in England and Scotland; and (2) those which are due to the great Methodist movement.

24. The Independents, as represented by Dr. Watts, have a just claim to be considered the real

founders of modern English hymnody. Watts was the first to understand the nature of the want; and by the publication of his "Hymns" in 1709, and "Psalms" in 1719, he led the way in providing for it. His immediate followers were Simon Browne and Doddridge. Later in the century, Hart, Gibbons, Grigg, and Mrs. Barbauld (the two first Independents, the two last Presbyterians), and Miss Steele, Medley, Stennett, Ryland, Beddome, and Swaine (all Baptists), with other less copious writers, succeeded to them. With these may be classed the authors of the Scotch Paraphrases, adopted by the General Assembly in 1745, and enlarged about thirty years afterwards; some of which are variations from hymns by Doddridge and Watts, and others original works, chiefly by Scottish Presbyterian ministers.

25. Among these writers (most of whom have produced hymns of merit), Watts and Doddridge are pre-eminent. It is the fashion with some to disparage Watts, as if he had never risen above the level of his "Hymns for Little Children." No doubt his taste is often faulty, and his style very unequal: he shares with the majority of hymn-writers (as well as epigrammatists) the censure, "*Sunt bona, sunt quædam mediocria, sunt mala plura.*" But, looking to the good, and disregarding

the baser matter, I cannot dissemble my opinion, **that** more hymns which approach to a very high standard of excellence may be found in his works than in those of any other single writer in the English language. I have already spoken of one masterpiece, "*When I survey the wondrous Cross.*" Another, almost equally popular, is a hymn founded on the 72nd Psalm. How excellent are the four first stanzas :—

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run ;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

For Him shall endless prayer be made,
And praises throng to crown His Head ;
His Name, like sweet perfume, shall rise
With every morning sacrifice.

People and realms of every tongue
Dwell on His love with sweetest song ;
And infant voices shall proclaim
Their early blessings on His Name.

Blessings abound where'er He reigns ;
The prisoner leaps, to lose his chains ;
The weary find eternal rest,
And all the sons of want are blest.

Another of his hymns, from the same Psalm, is not equally well known ; yet what can be better than these lines :—

As rain on meadows newly mown,
So shall He send His influence down :
His grace on fainting souls distils,
Like heavenly dew on thirsty hills.

The heathen lands, that lie beneath
 The shade of overspreading death,
 Revive at his first dawning light,
 And deserts blossom at the sight.

The saints shall flourish in His days,
 Dress'd in the robes of joy and praise :
 Peace, like a river, from His Throne
 Shall flow to nations yet unknown.

As long as pure nervous English, unaffected fervour, strong simplicity, and liquid yet manly sweetness, are admitted to be characteristics of a good hymn, works like these must surely command admiration.

Doddridge is much more laboured and artificial. But his place, also, as a hymn-writer, ought to be determined, not by his failures, but by his successes, of which the number is not inconsiderable. In his better works he is distinguished by a graceful and pointed, and sometimes even by a noble, style. Of the latter, the hymn, "*Hark, the glad sound!*" (already quoted for a different purpose) is a fine example. The following well represents his softer manner:—

How gentle God's commands,
 How kind His precepts are ;
 Come, cast your burdens on the Lord,
 And trust His constant care.

While Providence supports,
 Let saints securely dwell :
 That Hand, which bears all Nature up,
 Shall guide His children well.

Why should this anxious load
Press down your weary mind?
Haste to your Heavenly Father's throne,
And sweet refreshment find.

His goodness stands approved
Down to the present day:
I'll drop my burden at His feet,
And bear a song away.

Of the other writers named under this division, Miss Steele is the most popular, and (perhaps) the best. Her hymn beginning, "*Far from these narrow scenes of night,*" deserves high praise, even by the side of other good performances upon the same subject.

26. We now come to the hymns due to the Methodist movement, which began about 1738, and which afterwards became divided, between those esteemed Arminian, under John Wesley; those who adhered to the Moravians, when the original alliance between that body and the founders of Methodism was dissolved; and the Calvinists, of whom Whitfield was the leader, and Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, the patroness.

Each of these sections had its own hymn-writers. The Wesleyans had Charles Wesley, Seagrave, Olivers, and Bakewell; the Moravians, Cennick and Hammond; the Calvinists, Toplady, Berridge, William Williams, Madan, Batty, Haweis, Rowland

Hill, John Newton, and Cowper. Of these, all but Olivers, Bakewell, Cennick, and Batty (who were Methodist preachers), and Cowper, a layman, were ordained clergymen of the Church of England. Charles Wesley wrote "Presbyter of the Church of England" upon the titlepage of his latest works; and Toplady, Berridge, Newton, and Haweis died incumbents of benefices, though maintaining intimate relations with Lady Huntingdon, (who was always averse to any breach with the Church), and the ministers of her connection.

27. Among all these writers, the palm undoubtedly belongs to Charles Wesley. In the first volume of hymns published by the two brothers are several good translations from the German, believed to be by John Wesley; who, although he translated and adapted, is not supposed to have written any original hymns; and the influence of German hymnody (probably through their early connection with Count Zinzendorf) may be traced in a large proportion of Charles Wesley's works. He is more subjective and meditative than Watts and his school; there is a meditative turn even in his most objective pieces, (as, for example, in his Christmas and Easter hymns); most of his works are supplicatory; and his faults are connected with the same habit of mind. He is apt to repeat the

same thoughts, and to lose force by redundancy ; he runs, sometimes, even to a tedious length : his hymns are not always symmetrically constructed, or well balanced and finished off. But he has great truth, depth, and variety of feeling. His diction is manly, and always to the point ; never florid, though sometimes passionate, and not free from exaggeration ; often vivid and picturesque. Of his spirited style I know no better examples than the stanzas beginning—

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My dear Redeemer's praise ;

and the noble hymn,

Come let us join our friends above,
Who have obtained the prize.

Of his fervid comtemplative style, (confining myself to hymns fit for general adoption), the following is a late, but very characteristic, specimen :—

O Thou, who camest from above,
The pure celestial fire t' impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart.

There let it for Thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze.
And, trembling, to its source return
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus ! confirm my heart's desire
 To work, and speak, and think for Thee ;
 Still let me guard the holy fire,
 And still stir up Thy gift in me ;

Ready for all Thy perfect will,
 My acts of faith and love repeat,
 Till death Thy endless mercies seal,
 And make my sacrifice complete.

Of the other Wesleyan hymn-writers, Olivers (originally a Welsh shoemaker, afterwards a preacher,) is the most remarkable. He is the author of only two works, both of which are odes, scarcely (if at all) fit for singing ; but one of them, "*The God of Abraham praise*," is an ode of singular power and beauty.

28. The Moravian Methodists produced few hymns now available for general use. The best of them are Cennick's "*Children of the Heavenly King*," and Hammond's

Awake, and sing the song
 Of Moses and the Lamb ;

the former of which (in an abridged form), and the latter (as varied by Madan), are found in most hymn-books, and are deservedly esteemed.

29. The contributions of the Calvinistic Methodists to our hymnody are of greater extent and value. Toplady's "*Rock of Ages*" is, perhaps, the best hymn in the English language. Berridge,

Williams, and Rowland Hill, though not the authors of many good hymns, each composed some of great merit. Take for examples Williams's "*Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,*" Rowland Hill's "*Exalted high at God's right hand,*" and the following, by Berridge, from the 131st Psalm:—

Jesus, cast a look on me ;
Give me sweet simplicity,
Make me poor and keep me low,
Seeking only Thee to know ;

Weanèd from my lordly self,
Weanèd from the miser's pelf,
Weanèd from the scorner's ways,
Weanèd from the lust of praise.

All that feeds my busy pride,
Cast it evermore aside ;
Bid my will to Thine submit ;
Lay me humbly at Thy feet.

Make me like a little child,
Of my strength and wisdom spoil'd,
Seeing only in Thy light,
Walking only in thy might,

Leaning on Thy loving breast,
Where a weary soul may rest
Feeling well the peace of God
Flowing from Thy precious Blood.

In this posture let me live,
And hosannas daily give :
In this temper let me die,
And hosannas ever cry !

If, however, the number as well as the quality of good hymns available for general use is to be regarded, the authors of the Olney Hymns are entitled to be placed at the head of the writers of this Calvinistic school. The tenderness of Cowper, and the manliness of Newton, give the interest of contrast, as well as that of sustained reality, to the Olney Hymns. If Newton carried to some excess the sound principle laid down by him, that "perspicuity, simplicity, and ease should be chiefly attended to; and the imagery and colouring of poetry, if admitted at all, should be indulged very sparingly and with great judgment;" if he is often dry and colloquial; he rises at other times into "soul-animating strains," such as

Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, City of our God!

and sometimes rivals Cowper himself in his depth of feeling. Of the two following hymns, both characteristic, and both of first-rate excellence, it is not easy to say which is the best.

(1.) The first is by Newton.

Approach, my soul, the mercy-seat,
Where Jesus answers prayer;
There humbly fall before His feet,
For none can perish there.

Thy promise is my only plea,
 With this I venture nigh ;
 Thou callest burden'd souls to Thee,
 And such, O Lord, am I.

Bow'd down beneath a load of sin,
 By Satan sorely prest,
 By war without, and fears within,
 I come to Thee for rest.

Be Thou my Shield and Hiding-place,
 That, shelter'd near Thy side,
 I may my fierce accuser face,
 And tell him, Thou hast died.

O wondrous love ! to bleed and die,
 To bear the cross and shame,
 That guilty sinners, such as I,
 Might plead Thy gracious Name !

(2.) Now let us hear Cowper.

Hark, my soul ! it is the Lord,
 'Tis thy Saviour, hear His word :
 Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee ;
 " Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou Me ?

" I delivered thee when bound,
 And, when bleeding, heal'd thy wound ;
 Sought thee wandering, set thee right,
 Turn'd thy darkness into light.

" Can a woman's tender care
 Cease towards the child she bare ?
 Yes, she may forgetful be ;
 Yet will I remember thee.

“ Mine is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above,
Deeper than the depths beneath,
Free and faithful, strong as death.

“ Thou shalt see My glory soon,
When the work of grace is done ;
Partner of My throne shalt be ;
Say, poor sinner, lov’st thou Me ?”

Lord ! it is my chief complaint,
That my love is weak and faint ;
Yet I love Thee and adore—
Oh for grace to love Thee more !

30. We have now arrived at the present century, in which the honours of hymnody are again divided between Nonconformists and members of the Church of England. Beginning with the Nonconformists, their chief writers are Kelly (the son of an Irish Judge, ordained in the Established Church, but who afterwards seceded), and the Moravian poet, James Montgomery. Among those of less name, Conder, the author of the fine hymn beginning—

The Lord is King ! lift up thy voice,
O earth, and all ye heavens, rejoice,

is the most conspicuous.

Kelly and Montgomery are both copious writers, who began to publish hymns at the very commencement of the century ; and both, having lived

to a great age, died in the same year, 1854. Of the two, Kelly is the more simple and natural, Montgomery the more cultivated and artistic. Kelly, without the vivacity and terseness of Watts or the severity of Newton, has some points in common with both those writers; and he has the merit, if such it be, of being less subjective than most writers of the Methodist school, and preferring the first person plural to the first person singular. Some of his lines dwell long upon the memory, and dignify works not otherwise remarkable: as in the hymn, "*O Israel, to thy tents repair;*" the noble stanza—

Thou should'st not sleep, as others do :
 Awake ! be vigilant, be brave !
 The coward, and the sluggard too,
 Must wear the fetters of the slave.

His hymns beginning, "*Lo ! He comes, let all adore Him !*" and "*Through the day Thy love hath spared us,*" have a rich melodious movement; and the following is distinguished by a calm subdued power, rising gradually from a rather low to a very high key—

We sing the praise of Him who died,
 Of Him who died upon the Cross :
 The sinner's hope let men deride,
 For this we count the world but loss.

Inscribed upon the Cross we see
In shining letters, God is Love :
He bears our sins upon the Tree,
He brings us mercy from above.

The Cross ! it takes our guilt away ;
It holds the fainting spirit up ;
It cheers with hope the gloomy day,
And sweetens every bitter cup.

It makes the coward spirit brave,
And nerves the feeble arm for fight ;
It takes its terror from the grave,
And gilds the bed of death with light ;

The balm of life, the cure of woe ;
The measure and the pledge of love ;
The sinner's refuge here below ;
The angels' theme in heaven above.

I doubt whether Montgomery ever wrote anything quite equal to this ; but some of his hymns (such as "*Hail to the Lord's Anointed*") are extremely good : others, if not absolutely first-rate, are entitled to a high place in the second rank ; and the number of his valuable contributions to our hymnals is, upon the whole, considerable.

31. To the hymn-writers of the Church of England in the present century (and especially to some of those who are no longer among us, Bishop Heber, Sir Robert Grant, Bowdler, Marriott, Keble, Lyte, Bishop Mant, Anstice, and Neale,) belongs the praise of having reclaimed British Hymnody

from being the exclusive possession of particular schools or parties, and having relieved it from those prejudices to which (in the minds of many) its association with the idea of sect or party was sure to lead, and had actually led.

32. I shall not attempt to discriminate, or to weigh with accuracy, the merits of these authors. If I may compare them, generally, with those whom I have endeavoured to pass under review, I should be tempted to say, (not applying the criticism to all, and especially not applying it to Mr. Keble,) that while they have brought to the composition of hymns the grace and refinement, and the artistic skill, characteristic of cultivated taste and elegant scholarship, avoiding undue familiarity and the other faults to which an artless enthusiasm is usually liable, they fall, upon the whole, below the best works of their predecessors in the great qualities of simplicity and strength. Sir Robert Grant, Bowdler, and Bishop Mant are too florid and elaborate: in the musical flow and pleasing facility of Bishop Heber's verses, sound sometimes appears to lead the sense: and the tenderness of Lyte, Anstice, and some others whom I could name, is almost feminine. Allowing, however, for these drawbacks, we still owe to these writers many admirable works. They come too near to

ourselves and to our own time to be at present impartially judged. But I cannot persuade myself that the time will ever come when such hymns as Heber's "*The Son of God goes forth to war,*" "*Hosanna to the living Lord,*" and "*From Greenland's icy mountains,*" or Lyte's "*Pleasant are Thy courts above,*" and "*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide,*" or Keble's "*Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear,*" and "*The voice which breathed o'er Eden,*" will be less popular than they are with ourselves.

33. Of writers still living, (the names of many, and of some very eminent, will at once occur to my hearers,) I do not feel called upon to make myself, in this place, either the critic or the eulogist. But I may be permitted to say, that the most favourable hopes may be entertained of the future prospects of British Hymnody, when among its most recent fruits is a work so admirable in every respect as the Epiphany Hymn of Mr. Chatterton Dix; than which there can be no more appropriate conclusion to this lecture—

As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold:
As with joy they hailed its light,
Leading onward, beaming bright;
So, most gracious God, may we
Evermore be led to Thee.

As with joyful steps they sped
To that lowly manger-bed,
There to bend the knee before
Him whom Heaven and Earth adore ;
So may we with willing feet
Ever seek Thy mercy-seat.

As they offered gifts most rare
At that manger rude and bare,
So may we with holy joy,
Pure, and free from sin's alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to Thee, our Heavenly King.

Holy Jesus! every day
Keep us in the narrow way ;
And, when earthly things are past,
Bring our ransomed souls at last
Where they need no star to guide,
Where no clouds Thy glory hide.

In the heavenly country bright
Need they no created light ;
Thou its Light, its Joy, its Crown,
Thou its Sun, which goes not down.
There for ever may we sing
Alleluias to our King.

THE END.

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